

Titanfall:

Where Were You When the Giant Fell?

“In memory of Kimiko Nakamura, whose undying curiosity for the unknown opened new horizons. If only you could see how impactful your journal entries have become! You’ve made the family proud.”

-Sincerely, your dearest sister Lily.

My name is Kimiko Nakamura. I am an urban anthropologist Ph.D candidate. To commemorate the tenth anniversary of Titanfall, I have put together a compendium of interviews that I have collected over the course of the year. This metropolis now has 4.2 million people, half of what it was when the Balor fell from the sky. These conversations are without curated intent; they were conducted both formally and informally. I wanted to get as much of life from the recovering city as possible. My goal is to uncover the intimate thoughts of the citizens of this city post, during, and after the Titanfall. Some of my interviews are long, some are short. Some are dark and feature mature themes.

I.

Albert Gleeson, 42, chose to meet me at his favorite pub “The Rival Clam”. He bought my first pint and when I put down the recorder on the bar top, I could tell he was already at least two Guinness’s deep.

Where were you when the Giant fell?

It was my day off. I was running errands near Harbor Street. I remember it clearly, too. I was still dating Nancy. I had bags of vegetables in each arm and just started my walk back to the apartment. I don’t know if I was the first to notice the shadow in the whole city, but I know I was

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the first to notice it in the produce market. The sky immediately went dark, like someone snapped that damn thing into existence. When I looked up, I thought it was a plane. It didn't register to me that it was a skeleton until I saw it on the news. I dropped my vegetables.

It wasn't the impact that shocked me, it was the fallout. Buildings crushed under its weight, a giant femur crashing a bridge and slamming into the Eastern river. It was the dust clouds, Miss, the subterfuge from the impact drowning everyone on the pier. Did you know that we still don't know how heavy the skeleton is? It's immovable. Where it rests now is where it fell ten years ago.

You couldn't break the bones?

The technology isn't there yet. I was a member of the clean up crew. Nothing could puncture the bones. Our drills couldn't puncture it. Jackhammers would break. We even used controlled explosions! Some talking heads even used lasers and some shit. Nothing. Nada. I bet there are still loved ones unaccounted for underneath the bones. No, I don't bet, I *know*.

What was it like being a part of the cleanup crew?

Lots of overtime. After the funeral services, that shitty visit from the president, and the payouts to the families, the city really needs to keep on keeping on. It's human nature. It's healthy. The hardest parts were digging underneath the sides of the skeleton to dislodge whatever slabs of concrete or metal we could. Listen, I've been in the business for decades, but nothing was as strenuous as cleaning up after the Titanfall. Since we couldn't dig any handholds into the bones, we had to build ramps over it. The shins themselves are about eight stories high. Imagine wheeling a wheelbarrow full of concrete slabs up and down eight flights of steps. The unions had a field day. But one thing I've learned, Miss, is that there is still cleaning to do. Always, always

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to do. I can't imagine the bodies of the children still listed under "missing" in the public records. We all know where they are. They were crushed under the weight of that giant skeleton that just appeared in the sky. You want to know the worst part? The parents probably know exactly where they were crushed. They could walk along its mile-long arms, point and say, "There. Right there. That's where our little Daisy died"...and because we can't move the bones, little Daisy is probably still there. That's what kills me.

II.

Katrina Ann, 32, is a blogger who runs "Vegan Lifestyle is the Only Lifestyle". Her mission statement is self-explanatory. She won the citywide contest to name the skeleton. Truthfully, I'm not entirely sure why it needed a name in the first place. During the day, she runs a non-profit called "Living with Balor". I met her at a café stationed at the titan's left heel, where a row of apartment buildings and laundromats clung to its marrow like a barnacle.

Please tell me how you thought of the name for the skeleton?

I wanted to use my mythology degree for something. Kidding. Not really. After the cleanup from the incident, I think the city realized that the skeleton was here to stay whether we wanted it or not. It was no longer an invader but an uninvited houseguest who overstayed its welcome. I'm aware how pragmatic I sound. Think of the city as a tree. You know how trees will absorb foreign objects into its bark? After a couple years, Balor became a part of the infrastructure. But we couldn't just ignore it. It's creepy. It's a skeleton. So, the city decided to "humanize" it by holding a contest. Person with the most fitting name gets a legacy for naming a giant skeleton that massacred millions under its weight and a taxable check for five grand. I chose the name Balor, for its connection to Irish mythology. It went up against "George" and

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“Atlas”. When we were invited to the committee, the argument against “George” was that it was too casual. “Atlas” on the other hand, well, he’s known for holding up the sky while our giant skeleton brought the sky down on us. Not only offensively ironic, but also inaccurate.

Could you explain to me why the name Balor stood out to you?

The skeleton that dropped on us is seven miles long. I wanted something that people could comprehend. Since I’m Irish, the first mythological giant that came to mind was Balor, known for opening its one eye and causing destruction upon the land. I chose “Balor” instead of “Balar” because I wanted it to have more Celtic roots. It still surrounded the skeleton with mystery because, let’s face it, no one truly knows where the damn thing came from. One week they say its aliens, the week before someone suggested a shrink ray and we all went with it. My Aunt Sally is convinced that the skeleton was not dropped but *pushed*. If the skeleton didn’t look so human I think it would be easier to comprehend.

You said the mythological Balor has one eye. The skeleton that dropped has two.

Listen, I merely suggested the name. Take it to the talking heads that picked it. It’s better than George, anyhow.

III.

Jimmy Carnell, 28, has left his days as a skyrise window cleaner and is now a paramedic. When I asked him if the Titanfall was a motivator, he looked at me as if I had asked the most obvious question in the world.

Where were you when the giant fell?

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Where was I? I was in a lucky spot, that's where I was. My job took me across the river to clean a new fifty story high rise that was still eighty percent vacant. One second I'm squeegeeing and looking at myself in the reflection, wondering if I have a zit and thinking about my date that night, the next I see a giant skeleton over my shoulder. It looked fake, like someone was messing with me. I thought that I hadn't slept off my high from the night before. It almost looked like one of those fake skeletons they have in anatomy class. I know it didn't, but I swear the thing fell in slow motion. My doctor says it was because my heart was beating so fast that my adrenaline was up. I mean, I'm about thirty floors up, okay? And suddenly, like someone snapped, a giant skeleton, a *human* skeleton, mind you, appears in the sky faster than you could blink twice. Did you know that when the scientists measured it, the skeleton struck at seven miles long? It was bigger than my peripheries.

So you watched the whole thing?

The city went up in smoke. I saw the high rises, the very same that I've cleaned windows for just last week, crush under its weight. An entire bridge collapsed when its arms stretched from the impact. Cars fell into the ocean like someone spilled a bag of goddamn peanuts. The sound was what got me most. It was a deafening thud followed by the crush of the buildings then the updraft of smoke. Even from across the river I swear I heard each and every scream. I don't care if that sounds dramatic. I've never felt so helpless in my life.

Due to the destruction my boss forgot to take my scaffold down. I was stuck up there for eight hours baking in the sun, watching the city crumble underneath the weight. I couldn't take my eyes off the skeleton. Honestly, I thought it was a terrorist attack, or maybe an alien. But the skeleton looked so human and it fell, dare I say, so casually. It was like one of those claw machines you find at an arcade grabbed a skeleton and dropped it into our dimension.

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There were times when I thought it would get up, a giant human skeleton, and either dance around or move like the Evil Dead army. There were times when I thought it would turn its head and look at me, and I would be helpless on my little scaffold, armed with nothing but a squeegee, an empty can of coke, and a half-eaten tuna sandwich. Talk about David and Goliath, right? And yet here I am, alive because I worked West instead of East. I bet I have the record for watching the most amount of people die in one sitting. The number? 4.6 million.

IV.

Regina Lexin, 42, is the community director and urban planner for Community Board 13, located in the opening of the west hollow of the skeleton's armpit. Prior to the Titanfall, the neighborhood was known as Beansburg. Now, it is known as "West Axilla", although Lexin has hinted that another name might be in action to differentiate it from the hipsters in "East Axilla".

What new challenges have arisen when planning West Axilla? How has Balor impacted your ability to plan, organize, and build?

I'm afraid that my answer won't be as exciting as you think. It goes without saying that Titanfall was a catastrophe, but from an urban design perspective it was simply another natural disaster that needed tending to. Urban theorist Neil Smith once stated, "there is no such thing as a natural disaster". To a degree I am a firm believer. The Anthropocene is still terribly relevant. But this...when Balor dropped no one could blame global warming or the poaching of elephants. Balor simply happened. The hard part was rezoning the city. Balor effectively cut our total landmass in half. We had to build around and on top of it. We are more of a latitudinal city than not. More raised paths and weird shaped streets. I'm no plumber but I can only imagine that the

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piping for these new buildings must have forced some real ingenuity. It must have been a nightmare for them.

With West Axilla being in the armpit, what design challenges arise as opposed to being, say, near the skull or a femur?

Now that will bring a more interesting answer! With Balor laying as it is, one arm stretched over the Eastern river and the other almost parallel to its side, the whole urban landscape changed. A variable that a lot of people don't factor into their daily life is the association of *bodies in space*. Well, Balor is a large body in a large space. For example, West Axilla is statistically ten degrees cooler than say the South end of the city because the armpit forms a sort of wall from the sun. Because it is so close to the ribs, which shoot skyward rather than horizontal, it is closer to the highways. That's a big selling point. It's property value. East Axilla on the other hand—pun not intended—has the hollow from the armpit but a perfect view of the river because of the way Balor fell. Rent skyrocketed, and I can actively say that Balor had a literal hand in gentrifying that neighborhood. Pun intended.

But that's just a physical design aspect. Think of the psychogeography of the city. You ever wonder why all those millionaires relocated to the skull, and why all those tech start-ups are trying to wiggle their way there? Because it's the head of Balor. Simple as that. What's in the head? Brains. You know Restaurant Row, that street a bit south of East Axilla? That's near the heart. They go wild on Valentine's Day. More funded hospitals are located where the womb would be...and we don't know if Balor was even capable of birth. Did you know that on average there are more men with foot fetishes that live at Balor's heels? I'm not making that up. A colleague published a study on it.

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That all sounds really...fitting.

Call me cynical, but the cluster of low-income housing at Balor's anus is not a coincidence. That's Community Board 21. Not my jurisdiction but my goodness it is the Mayor's. It's a bit too on the nose. Speaking of noses, see if you can rally for some solar panels on Balor's cheeks. That part of the city gets the most sunlight and there is enough surface area that we can build on it. A lot of the city's energy infrastructure collapsed during the Titanfall so we've got to get creative. Let's just hope Balor doesn't move. I know it's a skeleton, but we've seen stranger.

V.

Seth Lamlin, 38, runs the group "Emergence". Originally chalked at just himself and his friends, they now have grown to a steady number of fifty. They speak every Wednesday in the basement of the church at Morrigan and Third in downtown Tibia. I spoke with Seth after one of their meetings. In exchange for using the space he agreed to dust and mop the church's floors. I helped him clean up.

Tell me a bit about Emergence.

We're a group of illuminated individuals who recognize the threat that the monstrosity everyone calls Balor means to humanity. Was that too forward?

Not if you elaborate.

I'm not a kook. None of us are paranoid.

Look, a giant skeleton appears faster than one can blink and drops on the city. It's indestructible and it looks human. Wouldn't you be wary? The city recovers, sure, but it's been

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ten years. No one has an idea where this thing came from. Did it come from the sky? Another dimension? Was it pushed or did it fall? Is it human, and if so, are we nothing more than ants to them? Are there more of them? People just gave up on the mystery of “Balor”. We didn’t.

Tell me how you started Emergence.

I was working as an assistant manager at a record store. I called in sick that day because I was hungover. Thank God I did because the shop now lays somewhere underneath its right palm. I ended up volunteering with what would eventually become “Living with Balor”. You know, soup kitchens, clothing drives. There was a certain calmness about the city. Everyone was so nice to one another and we didn’t need to worry about the origin of the skeleton because the “scientists” were on it. They were running tests all over the city, trying to take samples, test its indestructibility, goddamn taste tests for all I know. Then one day they just disappeared. Boom. Almost as fast as the skeleton came. Then the president came and we all know how that went. I’ve heard people describe the city as a tree, in that it absorbed “Balor” into its infrastructure. Well, that’s all good and great. Fantastic, we can recover as a species! But people were so enthralled by the recovery effort that they forgot what the skeleton is...a giant, human skeleton from beyond our collective comprehension.

So I got a beer the next day with some old college roommates and the next thing you know, we are hosting these meetings every week. You should see us on the message boards. We are really growing. Our physical presence is about fifty, but online? I’d say we have a good following of two thousand and growing!

Do you have any leads on the origin of Balor?

Leads? Sure.

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Would you mind telling me them?

Okay, they are more hunches that we have collectively decided. I mean, nothing is confirmed because no samples can be taken from the skeleton. But I have several theories. Consider this: What if there is a dimension of giants out there and they have pits where they toss their dead, just like we do? What if their pit got too full? So what do these giants do but toss their dead into another pit, which happens to be our planet? Maybe there is another planet full of giant skeletons? Another member suggested today that Balor was a terrorist attack from Russia. I don't really follow that one, but she raises a good point. Why did it fall on America and our city, of all places?

Got it. Would you mind telling me another?

Shrink rays. Someone reverse engineered shrink rays.

Why not "enlargement rays"?

Come on. You're the academic. That would be too obvious.

VI.

Johnathan Redman, 34, has given up shoes since the Titanfall. He runs "The Holy Children of Balor" off River Street and claimed almost immediately upon letting me into the building that their location is close to where the womb might have been (or *is*, in Redman's opinion).

How did "The Holy Children of Balor" form?

It didn't form. It was always here. We were just waiting. When I saw our great mother drop, I was afraid at first, but I realized after the sirens stopped and the smoke cleared that the

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world has changed. Balor was a herald of something greater. A sign! My only option was just to receive that we've been visited by something and someone greater.

In your perspective, Balor is a maternal figure even though in mythology Balor is typically depicted as male?

I didn't pick the name. Besides, our great mother is a god. It shocks me that no one sees it. It's a giant god from another dimension, proof of an eldritch force beyond even my own comprehension. Either we challenge it or embrace it. If people say their bodies are a temple, then what is Balor?

By the way, have you seen our pamphlets?

VII.

Tatiana Marshall, 42, is an osteologist who worked with the CIA in the first two years after Titanfall. Now working as an anatomy professor at a city university, we met via video chat during a break between classes.

Where were you when the giant fell?

I'll always remember that date because I was coming back from signing divorce papers, ha! I was finishing up my lunch in the park when some idiot started screaming near the fountain. I thought it was a homeless person but then everyone started to panic. Like any place with heavy clusters of people, the threat of terrorist attack is quite real. When I followed what everyone was pointing to and saw what looked like a skeleton falling from the sky...my first thought wasn't to find safety. At the risk of being unprofessional, my first thought was *what the fuck?* I ended up hanging in the back of a sushi restaurant with a bunch of strangers. So, I didn't see Balor actually

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fall, but the smoke that came from the debris wrapped around the restaurant like it was trying to suffocate us. Thank goodness the windows were closed.

What was it like being an osteologist during this time?

You're a researcher, Kimiko. Picture uncovering a text in your field that no one has read but everyone has access too. Or for a better metaphor, picture the world's best thieves having a competition to break the famed "unbreakable safe". I'm an osteologist. I study skeletons. When a giant one drops from nowhere that is as large as the city you live in, it started a marathon. I'm proud to say that I was not one of the more...ambitious researchers in the immediate weeks. Like everyone else, I was still accounting for those lost and those missing. Still, in my circles it was mania! Rows upon rows of osteologists picking for samples with little ice carvers in one hand and little bags in the other, as if we were mining salt. But as we all know now, Balor is indestructible. We still don't have adequate samples.

How exactly did you get employed by the CIA? Tell me of those experiences.

"Employed" is a term used by the tabloids. I was given a stipend to basically be the spokesperson for an international mystery surrounding Balor. I was, quite literally, the closest thing anyone could be to a "talking head". I mean, I was paid for research but since we don't have anything to reference all my published studies are nothing more than inferences. We tried it all. We had the military scan the air for any distortions in magnetic fields. This might suggest where Balor at least came from. We got nothing. We tapped on every square inch to see if Balor was anything but human, at least a little bit. We got nothing. We counted for different types of teeth and jaw structure that would suggest Balor's eating habits or, on the condition it was a human, that it was not a giant Neanderthal. We got nothing.

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You know, a part of me wishes that Balor is an alien skeleton.

Why?

It's still a mystery, but it's *less* of a mystery. If it's an alien, we can pigeonhole the story. Doesn't the headline "Giant Alien Skeleton Drops from the Sky" sound a little less overwhelming than "Giant Human Skeleton Drops from the Sky"? I think so. The former questions our place in the universe. The latter brings about myths, gods, and our own mortality. It's quite humbling in the most terrible sense.

Do you have any leads as to how to understand Balor?

I have a theory, but that's all it is. We tested the skeleton for traces of radiation and came up short. It was no Big Daddy or Little Man, no isotopes to report back. I fear that we might have to consider the long-term effects of living in and around the skeleton. Perhaps Balor exudes some interdimensional toxins that our current technology cannot pick up. Maybe in fifteen, twenty years we'll see the average height of the citizens living in its proximity increase. Maybe in twenty, thirty years we'll see the average life expectancy decrease. I'm just being arbitrary here to prove a point; the only way we can study Balor from an osteological perspective is to conduct a longitudinal study. Frankly, the CIA isn't paying me anymore to do this, so I suppose they'll have to find someone else. Alright, I've got to get back to class. Wait, this is off the record, right? I signed a ten-year NDA and I'm not entirely sure it's up.

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Throughout my endeavors to capture what it was like to experience the Titanfall, I found myself enthralled by the mystery from a more personal perspective. I am fortunate that I was living in Japan during the Titanfall, and that I had no experience of lost or missing loved ones.

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Their pain, however callous this may sound, is equated to falling victim to a natural disaster, a force beyond our comprehension. I've concluded that Balor is indeed a force beyond our comprehension, that the only absolute since the Titanfall was that we do not have a competent grasp of our reality. No physical or spiritual practice has prepared, or even given answers to, the existence of Balor. The giant simply is and the giant simply happened. I've enjoyed my time with my interviewees, and I am so thankful for those who helped guide me along the way. To those that I omitted from this collection, fear not, for if I included all fifty of my interviews, I would have gone mad.

Thank you. Long live our humanity. May we remain ever humble.

-Kimiko Nakamura

EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Nakamura's dissertation was completed and defended on the tenth anniversary of the Titanfall. She met her untimely death a year later visiting a friend in Russia, when Omega dropped on Moscow. She was among the perished 5.5 million.